MARIPOSA

On a fall afternoon, just a week later, we sit in the Figaro coffeehouse on the corner of McDougal and Bleecker Street, haunted by evasive earth smells. Mari sports a handmade, red corduroy jacket and bright yellow leather boots, gifts from her mother. Time and the proximity of their homes have brought them closer.

I still feel something special will happen to join us. After all, I have spent so many years loving her. I order lemonade and Mari orders a cappucino. I am trying to give up coffee as though the renunciation of the black drug could temper my feelings for her.

Coffee-making was the only activity I watched my parents truly enjoy together. Every morning they would rise early and brew their coffee to the sound of the mourning dove. Then, like two excited birds, they would gossip and sip before going about their tasks. What they have exchanged every morning for 60 years is their business. I never quite understood their riffs, but each time I drink a cup of coffee, I think of them and smile bemusedly at the mystery of my existence. Somewhere in my psyche I really believe I was born out of a pot of their mud-colored brew. I never told Mari that coffee always brings them back to me.

"You know, Mari, when we sit at a table like this, catty-cornered, it seems natural to reach out and touch each other."

"I didn't tell you not to touch me, Judith. I just say that I want to be your dearest friend now, not your lover."

"How can you be even my 'dearest friend' from the other side

of the world?" I snap. My body had foolishly started to reach out to her again.

"I say you can touch me," she says.

She confuses me. "Don't play with me, kid. You know what I mean. Touch. Caress. Lie down with. Hold. Make love with. Touch deeply."

"No, I don't feel that. I don't want that," she replies.

Maybe if we were in the country I'd have a chance with her. Maybe I have a problem with boundaries between friendship and lovership. I seem to feel that once a lover always a lover. I should probably take this up with a therapist. But definitely Mother Nature could help me straighten out these confusions. I actually cheer up at this thought and begin tapping on the table top. When the strange phrase pops into my head, *The Last Resort Motel*, I snap out of my revery.

I suddenly remember our destination for the afternoon. "Hey, Mari. The documentary on Chile begins in fifteen minutes. Did you say it lasts four hours? What if I can't sit through it?"

"Judith, I really want you to see this film. You'll know my reality better. I really want you to see her with me."

"I understand, Mari, but I hardly ever go to the movies any more. They make me nauseous. Something about the deodorant they use to clean the theaters, and the lack of air. Or the darkness with rows of people staring straight ahead, lost in two-dimensional images. All these things make me feel sick. I get claustrophobic and usually have to leave."

"If you have to leave, Judith, then leave. But I want you to know my landscape. Besides, it's so great a film I hear, and I will stay even if you have to leave." She moves her chair back abruptly and heads for the cashier.

At the last documentary I saw, *Harlan County, USA*, I had to leave mid-way through. Maybe I just can't take violence in films and most contemporary films have violence in them,either implied or shown directly.

The film we are to see, *Allende's Chile*, was banned in Argentina by the military government. It documents the events leading up to Allende's murder and the overthrow of his Marxist-oriented

government.

"Why don't you get some fruit, Mari?" I suggest as we pass a nice-looking fruit stand on Bleecker Street. "I'll get the tickets and wait for you in the lobby. Peaches, bananas, pomegranates would be good," I call back to her. These are the fruits lovers might eat together. "And get some popcorn too. It's cheaper than in the theater."

I wonder if we'll hold hands.

The theater is very crowded and we have to take seats near the front.

After forty-five minutes of demonstrations, speeches, confrontation, an uneasy feeling begins in my stomach. At first I try to close my eyes and breathe deeply. I've never seen a film jump around so much. I am dizzy.

Mari is totally captivated. She is back home in South America. I try to curl up and close my eyes. The tight chair can't hold me and I keep knocking the person next to me. Each time I do, he says politely, "I'm sorry."

The uncomfortable feeling grows. I turn to Mari and grimace. "I've got to go out for a while. I'm feeling nauseated. If I don't come back, look for me out front." I run up the aisle stepping over people huddled there. At the swinging doors, I spy a metal stand for cigarette butts filled with sand. What a mess I could make in there. I must hold it in a little longer.

Out in the street my eyes light upon a small, cardboard box. It seems to be waiting there for me. I dip down, vomiting up peaches, popcorn, lemonade and lunch into it. Then I fly down the street into the moist night air. Later, I'll do something with the box.

Through a warm mist, heavy shapes appear, familiar but not compelling. They are the NYU apartment buildings which surround the nondescript Picasso head. I am drawn, however, to this closest sanctuary of grass and trees.

I find a tree, one of those brave skinny city characters, and nuzzle against it.

The moon is full of herself. The bright circle of light, like a shot of whiskey, brings me back quickly to myself. The violent

scenes have made me very tense. I take deep breaths to relax. Slowly my mind wakes up.

My politics are very simple. Place me next to a tree like this and I will debate with the moon. But I don't want to see another documentation of violence.

A smell invades my moon contemplation. I try to ignore it as I would an annoying fly, but it persists. I trace the smell to the grass underneath me. A chemical smell. Spray. They've sprayed everything here. Of course they would. These are expensive apartments and they have to kill the weeds. The dandelions, the chamomile, the lambs-quarters must go.

The smell brings back my nausea again. I'll walk back to the theater. I'll try again. She wants me to see this film with her. She'll only be here for two more weeks. I've got to try again.

I look for my box of vomit. I can't believe it's gone. Don't even attempt to guess what's happened to it. I enter the theater and find a place to kneel in the aisle in case I have to leave again. I see Mari to the right of me. Her face is directed fixedly at the screen.

I will always remember her like this, wearing worn jeans and the brown army shirt she wore to paint in when we worked on the paint crew. I had saved it—in case she returned.

She is Tanya, Julia, Emma, Simone. She is Mari. Her life has nothing and everything to do with mine. She is Mari. I am Judith. I am Judith who in the 60's worked full time in the anti-war movement. I am Judith who learned how to create with others. I am Judith who wants to be aware of the political struggles unfolding around the world. I am also Bird who transforms herself by chanting and singing. That is Mari whom I'll love and cherish and hold close to my heart, always.

I feel myself swaying back and forth on my haunches in the aisle of the theater and realize I have been murmuring a kind of prayer. Someone asks me to be quiet. I stand up. I have seen my film on Chile. I go to Mari and whisper that I have to go home. She is welcome to come over after the film if she wishes. She says she will see how she feels then. It seems right that she can choose to come or not to come.

She does come, and I have dinner waiting for her. We can't be that far out of touch. She tells me about the film. I enjoy her enthusiasms and her criticisms. We fall asleep beside each other on the couch and in the middle of the night when she reaches her arm out for mine I move toward her. She puts her arms around me and we fall asleep, holding each other and feeling close.

* * *

We spend our last weekend together in the country, not only for pleasure, but to work. On Saturday afternoon she reads her poetry and talks to a small group of fascinated villagers at Lynn Rutger's pleasant bookstore in a small New England college town. I give an evening concert for the students.

They hear her poems about childhood, traveling, impressions of America and her myths of the Indian people she knows. First I read her work in English and then she reads in Spanish. I am proud to be her friend, her co-worker. Those in the audience who know Spanish are especially enthralled by her work. The rest of us let cadences roll over us like healing ocean waves.

That night I sing with my marimba, the instrument I have carried with me since childhood, the instrument Meredith, my twin, and I once shared.

The evening's event takes place in a small dance studio. A potter from the area softened the space with her clay pots which were shapes of the female body. She planted a small tree with orange leaves in the center of the room.

Mari drifts in and out of the studio while I am setting up with Gazelle, my sound woman for the night. We set amplifiers on the opposite side of the room from the musical instruments. Music will surround the audience, instead of blast it. I place a mirror on the piano so that the audience can see my face as I do a couple numbers on that instrument. And to make a ceremonial atmosphere, I put candles on small round mirrors in an arc around me and the instruments. The masks which I hang in the space above me, enhance my music with their mysterious presences.

I hear Mari's poetry again chanting in me as I work. I decide I will sing my song for her, one last time. I want to make her una-

voidable leave-taking bearable by sharing the song with others.

Mari doesn't take her eyes off of me that night. I feel her almost loving me again, wanting to hold me, embrace me, touch me, make love with me. She cries when I sing her song. Orange leaves waft about as I play; the leaves seem to respond to a primal energy.

Afterwards at Tony's house where we are staying—she and her husband have organized our two events—we socialize with a small group of admirers.

Skip, a tall woman with a bandana, tells us about the phenomenal amount of UFO's in the area. For days her dog, an excellent hunter, barked every night, pointing towards the same spot, a clump of pine trees 50 yards from Skip's small farmhouse. Yet whenever Skip searched this area, she could find nothing. One morning when she investigated carefully, she found a burnt place on the ground. Looking up she saw that all of the branches directly above this spot were burnt and broken off. The spot felt electric to her, filled with an intense energy. She was sure a UFO had landed there.

We ask her if she was frightened and she says, "You bet I was. I still am."

I suggest to her that perhaps some part of sky lab has fallen there.

"Wouldn't you have seen a piece of metal, something that had caused the burning place?" Tony askes Skip. Like the rest of us she is fascinated and alarmed.

"Maybe it was some combustible vapor like gas," Skip replies.

Mari's eyes are as large as mine. "Don't make sense, because how would the gas not have dispersed long before it landed there."

"I know it doesn't make sense, but what does, when it comes to the U.S. arms race," I say.

Skip leaps towards us. She looks first at Mari and then at me with a look of one about to explode. "They harm their own citzens with their war games. I swear, I think they're on a suicide trip, a mass suicide trip. If you think Guyana was abominable,

this holocaust being played with is beyond comprehension."

Skip says, "Mari and Judith, you don't know how I needed you today. I was feeling so negative, so lost. You know that they are trying to build a nuclear power plant only five miles from this town? Many of us are here to get back to the land—we grow vegetables and raise goats. We are organizing to stop them. But I'm depressed all the time. If only I had the strength to..." She breaks off as if to hold back an uncontrollable anguish, then sinks into a large easy chair with a great sigh.

Jill, a smallish woman, puts her arm around Skip as she speaks. "We're all being affected by this race for nuclear power. Have you noticed how many articles recently are trying to imply that the 'real' Americans are for it, for nuclear everything. They pooh-pooh the fact that the scientists admit there are not adequate storage facilities for the waste products already existing. Nuclear waste products last for thousands of years longer than any storage containers that can be built to hold them."

Shira, who sits in the far corner of the candle-lit room on the edge of a stool, drums rapidly on a conga drum. She begins to talk as she plays.

"Judith, you really should have the subject of nuclear disarmament be part of your concerts," she says in a syncopated rhythm with the drum beats. "Maybe someone could give a speech. We've got to stop the production of any more plutonium and develop safe ways of storing the waste materials already produced. A whole culture has to be developed around taking care of these lethal products."

"How can we do that?" I ask.

"A portion of the world could be set aside to be used only for storage. Each succeeding generation of people would be responsible to build new waste containers as the old ones deteriorate. You know, our earth has a phenomenal power to heal itself, with our help!" She ends her comment with a short rendition of a new song by the Earth Sisters—'Three Mile Island is in your own Back Yard.'

When she stops the song abruptly, I call out to her, "Shira, I would like to talk more with you about this. Mari and I are stay-

ing here for a couple of more days. Tomorrow we are hiking in the woods near Lake Tuckahoe. But on Monday I'm free. Could you meet with me then?"

"Sure, and I'll get other women to come too. We've been talking about organizing a women's speak-out against nuclear power. We could travel around the country, spreading information on alternative possibilities."Shira spins off her stool and joins us.

I see her face clearly for the first time. It has a serious clown look. She continues drumming nervously on her knees as she sits in a straight-backed lotus position beside Mari. She looks ready to spring into action at a moment's notice.

We were exhausted by the time we went to sleep that night. There was always more and more work to be done. Shira was right. I should engage the audience in a discussion on how we can save our planet.

I fell asleep forgetting for once to worry about whether Mari and I would ever be lovers again. We had work to do. I fell asleep hugging her, realizing my immediate need for a companion paled within the larger struggle—survival of my world. It didn't matter where she lived. That she live was all that mattered.

The next day we took time to search out a spot in the woods that suited us both. I could almost smell the orange and red leaves under our feet. She skipped across them and they seemed to leap and somersault everywhere.

She wanted a cave-like place where she could rest and I wanted a hill-crest where I could watch out for intruders. When we tired of walking we worked out a compromise without much fuss.

She lay down several yards from me and buried herself in the leaves. I fought off a huge desire to leap on her and cover us with a blanket of color. She needed space. We could be alone and together at the same time. I rested against a birch tree on a wave of earth above her.

I thought of my mother then and realized that ever since I had

stopped caring so much if she understood me or not, I could actually keep tender, generous thoughts for her. Like Mari, she was her own person with her own needs, limitations and frustrations. Yet I knew that I would always feel wounded by her inability to embrace me more fully. I had told her nothing about my relationships since my separation from Josh except that I was living alone. And she didn't ask. I was not the source of her happiness or unhappiness. She had to work that out for herself. I promised myself that if she tried to manipulate me again, I would call her on it. I would say, "If you want to know who I am you have to work at it. You have to want to listen to me, to know me."

Tension from yesterday's work left my body. I felt more inside myself than I had for a long time. I lost sight of Mari and began breathing deeply. How thankful I felt to be in the woods. With her, without her, it was good to be alive.

A sweet inner voice spoke: *When you are alone, enjoy that. When you are with another, enjoy that.*

I rested deeper into the earth, the birch trees, the sky. Mari had once told me, "Let the life to flow." That was happening. The life was flowing.

You are doing your work and she is doing hers, my voice continued. *You have had a great gift to see each other again.*

Wet leaves, a squirrel, puff balls, spider webs appeared magically before me. I felt that Bird was addressing Judith. *There is so much to be seen, enjoyed. Allow life to happen, little one. Be good to yourself. Be kind. After all, you will always be with you, while others will come and go.*

I started chanting, "Hold close tightly and let go lightly," when I heard someone whistling. It was Mari.

Leaves fell everywhere around me. I rolled in gold, yellow, brown, orange, red leaves and Mari rolled over me, around me, under me. She brushed the leaves from my hair.

"I was having a strange dream, Judith. I dreamt an old brown woman, but she didn't seem old, picked me up and carried me to my little cabin on the Parana and all my dogs came up to me and were licking me. I dreamt she took me home. I miss it so, my own home. So I come to wake you up because I felt lonely."

She curled up beside me and put her head on my shoulder. Momentarily I felt dampness on my skin by her head. She was crying. "Oh, Judith, don't you see why I can't to be in love with you again? Why I can't be in love with your dirty city? It would kill me to stay here. I know I could find a way to break the visa if I had to. But now I know for sure my home is Argentina. I had to travel over continents, back and forth over oceans before to find out my home is my home. My new-old roots grow there. And I have something so important to tell you. Something you in your wisdom would already know would be. I have become a true deep lover with someone you know."

"Don't tell me that wild woman poet from the bookstore in Paris showed up at your door in Buenos Aires?"

Mari laughed almost giddily, deeply, freely. There were no signs of the forced glee she had when I first knew her.

"Who, sweetheart? Tell me."

"I became my own best lover as you taught me. The kindest gift you could ever give me."

She seemed to be blushing, but then the sun was lighting up her face in the most compelling way.

"Oh, Mari,"...my voice broke. She caught me as I fell towards her. I felt the rhythm of her breathing as we embraced.

* * *

"Here, I want give you something." Mari's fist is close around some small object. The unmistakeable smell of turpentine tickles my nose.

"Oh, I love that smell. I always see huge paintings with brilliant shapes done in primary colors when I smell it. A feast for the eyes."

She reveals her object, slowly moving it away from my face so that I can see it more clearly. Two pine cones are joined at their tops, making a V shape between them.

"Oh, poor things," I say. "Where did you find them?"

"Under the brown leaves over there." She points to the spot where she had rested. "Seem so dear to me, like the two in the one. Like I feel I'll always long to be so I won't be alone."

"Then I'll take it as a reminder of you, Mari. I get a funny feeling just looking at this twosome. That's what I have struggled to get away from."

"I wanted to ask you again about your sister."

"Didn't I tell you that she came to see me just before you came back? I was shocked to see her. It was like she dropped out of the sky. In some ways I feel like she's the part of me I left behind at some crossroads. I might have lived her life except for a quirk in nature that sent me on another path. I wonder if she feels the same about me. I wonder if Meredith ever thinks, I mean even for just a second, about being with a woman. Maybe she does and that's why I'm scary for her."

"People can have all kinds of thoughts in their head at one time, Judith, but the key is which ones we act on."

"That's just it. A primary need for her is to be attractive to and close to men. A primary need for me is to feel attractive to and connected to a woman. Maybe I inherited something from my mother's genes that makes me need to lie with women. Who knows. I don't think my being a lesbian has anything to do with being a twin or empathizing with my mother when I was little. I know one set of twins, women, who are both straight as arrows. And I know other twins who are both gay. Thank god no one will ever figure this out. But I can just imagine that one day a scientist is going to point out someone's chromosome and say, 'See that blue dot. We found one of those in seven out of every ten lesbians.' "

"That seem horrible. You can analyse this thing the backwards and forwards and still no one know. Did you ever think that maybe there is an unconscious force in us to give back to women what seem they aren't getting from the men?"

"You mean we're keeping an ecological balance in the world by nourishing other women because so many are really underfed emotionally?"

"Si. For example, I see so much that it is the women and the lesbians who take care for the elderly, the handicapped and also are so concerned for the environment. In some ways they are the protectors of all life. Women are so much the force to stop

the madness. I speak you about the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo didn't I?"

"The relatives and mothers of the missing young people from the Junta? Yes, I saw a news coverage about them the other day. The commentator say they are doing more in their silent vigil each day to help stop the kidnappings and murders of the young politicos than any other factor."

"It is like when women group together with common cause that the gods bow down before them."

"Mari, how can we not love other strong, caring women, intelligent women. If people were allowed to love freely there just would be more same sex loving in the world."

"Love is touch. Touch is know. But Judith, don't you think you make your path to happen?"

"Sure, I use a scythe to cut my way through the woods. But there are times I feel like life lives me; I'm not always in charge."

"I know what means. So we got off our path too. You were to tell me about what you tell Meredith."

"I tried to talk to her. She noticed your pictures. She was drawn to the exotic woman I had on my wall. She began to ask questions and then when I tried to talk to her, she cut herself off from me. So I tried to talk more generally about myself so she wouldn't feel threatened by a particular person. But I was chicken. I couldn't bring myself to use the big L word."

"You mean *love*?"

"I mean *lesbian*."

"I said I slept with women, I loved women. She said there's a word for that, but she didn't want to hear it and that it was disgusting, but that I wasn't disgusting. You know the typical things that all liberal homophobes say."

"That doesn't sound liberal to me. Sound closed-minded. I'm sorry, Judith. I feel sad that you can't to speak freely with anyone in your family about your essential you. Families are so the cruel to each other."

"It's funny, but even when I was very young I remember thinking, knowing, that friends were going to help me survive more than family. And yet I'm always crying that I don't have a

traditional family like other people."

"It seem you have trouble accepting yourself as much as Meredith have trouble accepting you. Maybe she smells your fear like animals do and maybe she is afraid for you."

"That upsets me, Mari." I reach out for the hand she is offering me.

"She probably thinks its very lonely for you. That you don't have a husband and kids like her. Didn't you tell me she has two boys?"

"Yes. She has a Mari too and a Sal. Mari is short for Mario. Isn't that a coincidence?"

"See, Judith, you can't to escape your connection. You know, I bet I would love her just as much as you."

"But Mari, she isn't at all like me."

"I have a feeling she is both more like you and more different than you can see. That's so beautiful. But you're afraid for that. Do you know your voice change when you talk about her? It's so mysterious thing for me."

"Like how?"

"You always look at me in a funny way, from the side—careful, maybe, guarded. Then you talk softer, more slow and measured."

"I'm still afraid people won't like me so much if they know I'm a twin. But isn't that crazy. I'm still that little kid that wanted her own friends."

"I think is a so beautiful reality to have a sister as close to you."

"And yet so far." I see myself hovering over Mari for warmth, for assurance.

"I told you how much it has made me feel to belong since I know my sister Claudia again in Argentina. She was so young when I first left there. Now we can share together. I stay with her some times at the Universidad where she go. I retrace my travels for her and I see them so much better now telling her and feel her perspective. Probably because she came from same place she can see more clear than me. Maybe there is too much hurt at other times how I can to have left her. She wear my bone

stone, you know the one I always kept for good luck, around her ankle. So sweet. She knows just what she want, a good job. She study to be an engineer. She doesn't have that terrible need to know everything that I have, but she is so good reality check for me. She keep me focused in some way because she doesn't have that awe for me like people here have."

"That sounds almost too healthy!"

"I can tell her the little vulnerable things about me."

"Like what?"

"Like what I can't tell the people here."

"Like me?"

"Things that keep me so much like all the people."

"Okay, you can have some secrets. I won't pry. Sometimes I think if I get too healthy I wont be lovers with anyone. Isn't that crazy? Isn't sex healthy?"

"You'll find another healthy woman. And you should be proud to be twin, Judith."

"That's what Meredith says too."

"Maybe if you could be more relax about having a twin could help you be more relax about loving women. Maybe you could have been more relax about loving me when I was with you instead of when I was away from you. When it was so much the safer. Promet me something." She strokes my hair in a tender way

"What?"

"Promet me that your next lover you will embrace fully and you will take her to meet Meredith. If she love Meredith, Meredith will accept her and you. Love makes love. It's just when people feel they are losing love that they get so tight and critical."

"Here, Mari, let me hold the pine cone."

She retrieves our treasure from her shirt pocket where I'd put it. I hold it for a few moments then put it in my shirt pocket.

"I want to say something." I close my eyes and hold both her hands tightly with mine.

"The two in the one, the two in the one. You are the moon. You are the sun. You were my lover, you are my friend. And in that way our love won't end."

"So the beautiful, Judith."

"Wait I'm not done. My poems always come in pairs. Ready? The one in the two, the one in the two. I can be me and you can be you. I like red and you like blue. Together we make a purple hue."

"My one in the two, I bet the Mama had plenty envidia of you two."

"Envious? That's what I've been trying to tell you. People do get jealous when they see two of any kind of people together and they feel alone. I don't want other people to feel left out. I was caught between my mother and my sister. I didn't want either of them to feel left out. I couldn't stand it when Josh felt left out from my love for you either."

"Hokay, I get you. But you have to be you."

"Oh, Mari, I want to fill out my shape better, walk more solid on this earth. Not have unnecessary suffering for others. Is that possible when there is so much suffering?"

"Your shape look good to me, mi pájarita."

Her hands on my face, my shoulders, my arms, feel so comforting.

"You have to feel good to do good, Judith. You helped me with that."

"You know, my South American woman, that's how you have helped me. Your courage to be you, to take your road regardless of how other people have tried to stop you. That's the gift you have given me. But I accept the pine cone too, my two face Mari, my North American, my South American Mari. You have given me courage to embrace my different parts. God, have you helped me. Yes, I can think of it as the one in the two and the two in the one."

"You know, Judith. I just have this feeling in me that soon Meredith will be able to hear you better. She did come to see you. She did begin to ask you about me. And sometime a change in our life, could even be something terrible tragic like a death or sickness, that open us up to more understanding. That happen to me when my close beloved Margarita die. I learned not to be afraid to love, to not be afraid to feel my love and let it

take me where it lead me. Maybe that too could happen to Meredith. She could see how important it is to love you no matter what."

I feel a sharp pain in my chest—who is it for?

"Come here, my beauty. I see the tears in your eyes."

"It's not so much that I miss Meredith as much as I miss what we don't have. More acceptance. It's so hard to keep trying. I just don't know how we all keep trying."

"You have to allow your feelings, Judith. It's hokay whatever you feel. Come on to cry with me. Go with your fears."

I buried my head in Mari's chest and sobbed heavily. She kept stroking my hair, easing me slowly into a calm place.

"Mari, I needed that so bad."

"I can cry with you, too. Here, Pájarita, a kleenex. Now blow your nose."

"Could we just say a prayer now with mother nature? I want everyone we love to be here with us."

We sat cross-legged, facing each other and named all those close to us. I felt again how two together can give birth to so much love. I felt the others sitting in a much larger circle arounc us, rocking to the rhythm of our naming; they were smiling. We were all part of a smiling circle of love.

After a long silence I opened my eyes. I felt I had landed on the earth again. Mari—sitting in front of me—seemed almost unapproachable, sacred. I wondered if my presence felt as strong to her as hers did to me. I felt I was emerging from the last throes of a trance. Everything around me seemed to slow down from a trembling motion into a solid, real, still place. I was really here and Mari was really with me.

I felt my mind had been cleared of fantasies and anxious yearnings. Still, I knew that if she had said to me, "I am in love with you again," my passionate feelings would have surfaced towards her. I loved her deeply, completely. Yet, I was poised to both hold her close and let her go lightly. This is what I would have to do—hold her close in memory, let her go in reality.

"Mari." I brushed an orange leaf from her blouse. "Do you

want to hear an amazing coincidence? Last week I had a dream that an old woman asked me to walk with her to a cabin hidden in the woods. But for some reason which isn't clear to me yet, I couldn't go with her. I was supposed to do something first. What did your brown lady look like?"

"Her eyes poked through a thousand wrinkles. She wore a huipil, a cloak of many colors, and she carried a backpack like mine."

"Mine had a brown cloak and a purple velvet skirt and breasts kind of like mine."

"It's obvious that your lady and mine weren't the same person, Judith."

"No, but they could have been sisters," I laughed.

"Like you and me, Judith."

"Like you and me, Mari."

* * *

On Monday night before she left, we sat a long time in the Chinese restaurant on the corner of Broadway and 94th Street. The waiter brought fortune cookies and we opened them at the same time.

"What does yours say?" she asked me first.

"Mine says, *A good deed eases the heart.* "

"But that's exactly what mine says," Mari says. This has never happened to either of us before.

That was the night I brought all of her photographs to return to her. I also brought the butterfly ring that Margaret had made. It was wrapped in silver foil because I had no wrapping paper. She took the butterfly ring, but she would not take the photographs.

We looked at them together and we both tried not to cry. That was the last night I saw her. She put the mariposa ring on her finger. Mariposa was the first Spanish word she had ever spoken to me.

* * *

Today I think of the women I am close to. I will see Chloe next Sunday. She is raising three children alone. I could use

some kids in my life and Chloe could use some help. Jessie returns from a women's music festival on Friday. When she tells me she loves me I hear a simple melody played by a flute. The song relaxes me. I don't feel I have to perform any magic tricks for her.

Maybe I have finally learned something about loving more easefully. I want to let joy and responsibility blend into a happy pair. I surely know something more about how our souls in their loneliness will invent all kinds of connections in hopes of sustaining that oneness which seems so terrifying, so impossible to achieve.

I think our best lovers remind us of our own potential and complexity. They serve as splendid models of the yet unborn twin, triplets we have tucked inside us. I know I see my various selves mirrored in the faces of those I am drawn to. But it's sad when twins, just like other twosomes, become puppets of simplistic views and rules. We are easy prey to glib fables about opposites. My struggle is to become as whole a person as I can, not to fit neatly on the other side of someone's coin.

You know, one could do worse than hook up with a twin. Though we have an innate tendency toward *twinning*—we tend to blindly embrace those we are fond of with our psychic arms and in the process lose sight of necessary boundaries—we are naturally disposed to consider the other person as much as ourself.

Querida Mari touched ground again in her green land months ago. She has the empathetic heart and soul of a twin. Though I couldn't always talk to her the way I had imagined, though I couldn't always find the words needed to make a bridge, not between her country and mine, but between her and me, though I couldn't bear to go to the airport with her this last time around, I know this concentration of words held her aloft as she flew back to Argentina. These sentences helped her past the custom officials and the military who questioned her and asked to see her identification papers. These paragraphs guided her up the river to her little cabin. And these pages helped me discover that I can be without her in my bed, without her at the dinner table,

without her walking down the street at my side. I can enjoy a cup of coffee without her joining me.

Now when I miss her, I have this document to remind me how much we have shared. I hope this attempt to write my story well inspires at least one other person to tell theirs. I wanted to say *our* story but Mari has her own story to write. Maybe I'll call up Sarah Schoen and ask her if she'd like to read it.

I wish I had the courage to show the manuscript to Meredith. Would she think I turned her into a caricature? I'd have to change the point of view, make it more objective as Josh always told me to do. Then I'd have to change everyone's names. Where would I say Meredith and I were from? But then it wouldn't be Meredith and Judith anymore. And can you imagine turning Mari into a Mario so that Meredith would be more comfortable? Everyone would be wearing masks. That would be someone else's story. That would not be my story.

* * *

20 de enero, from my little house

Dearest one, my friend, Judith. I'm back here again after the so beautiful time in your country and the so splintered time with you. But it was like the miracles that follow us through all our life that our last days together had the depth of feeling that were in our first days but with the recognition of the reality of our lives. I won't be back to your country for a long time. Possible never.

I'm here to live a great love.Working and learning and dreaming with my feet over the sea. You would love this land and her people as much as I love them and some day you will to come here and walk the roads with me. Joy and hope come back to my eyes and they come from the people living a strong life in the middle of them tragedy and misery.

Judith, strange, but now, only now, I discover myself being like you, or being you, or feeling the same that you feel. Tonight singing a long song I improvised about moving through the sky with my small fire horse, running over the earth, out of time like a child like almost non human. I feel by first time I really know

you, so then by first time I really love you. It helped me so much to hear you say that only when I was away from you could you say to me that you were in love with me. From the distance I have now it seem we know all along that we could not to live with each other at these times, so that in some way we were both trying to take care for each other and for our self.

Today I really finished ***Zorra's Book****. I gave it to the publishers. It's so warm here. I have put away the white wool hat that you gave me in New York but I wear the butterfly ring all the times.*

Tell Josh maybe I began to become really a poet, but I would like to say you that maybe I'm really becoming political, a revolutionary. But, I want to live for my people now, not to die for them.

The sun raise over the earth for all of us. I pray to Pachamma Tonantzin Tiamat for you and pray for one day when you will be able to travel to me, the day that it will be right for you to come here.

Please write to me the little things of your life when you can.

Chou, Mari

photo by Rain Bengis

Jeriann Hilderley studied at Smith College, University of California, and obtained the MA degree of Art from the University of Michigan. Her sculpture shows were part of the reawakening of women's symbols and imagery in the mid 1960s. She was founder and a director, actor, musician in the collective groups, *Burning City Street Theater,* and *Women's Ritual Theater*, both based in New York City from 1968 to 1972. She has performed her music, recorded on *Sea Wave Records*, throughout the U.S. and Canada. Her poetry, plays and analytical writings on theater, group dynamics, music and ritual have appeared in such publications as *Chicago Review, Heresies, People's Theater in America, Woman Spirit,* street theater anthologies and music journals. Reviews of her work have appeared in the *Village Voice, Ms.* magazine and the *Guardian.* She has taught at the University of Michigan, the Henry Street Settlement, SUNY Purchase, and has given resident workshops in creative music and theater at several colleges. She is licensed as a Music Educator-Therapist in Special Education, and presently works in the New York City public schools. She has been part of many movements and wishes to write and sing about what she has learned.

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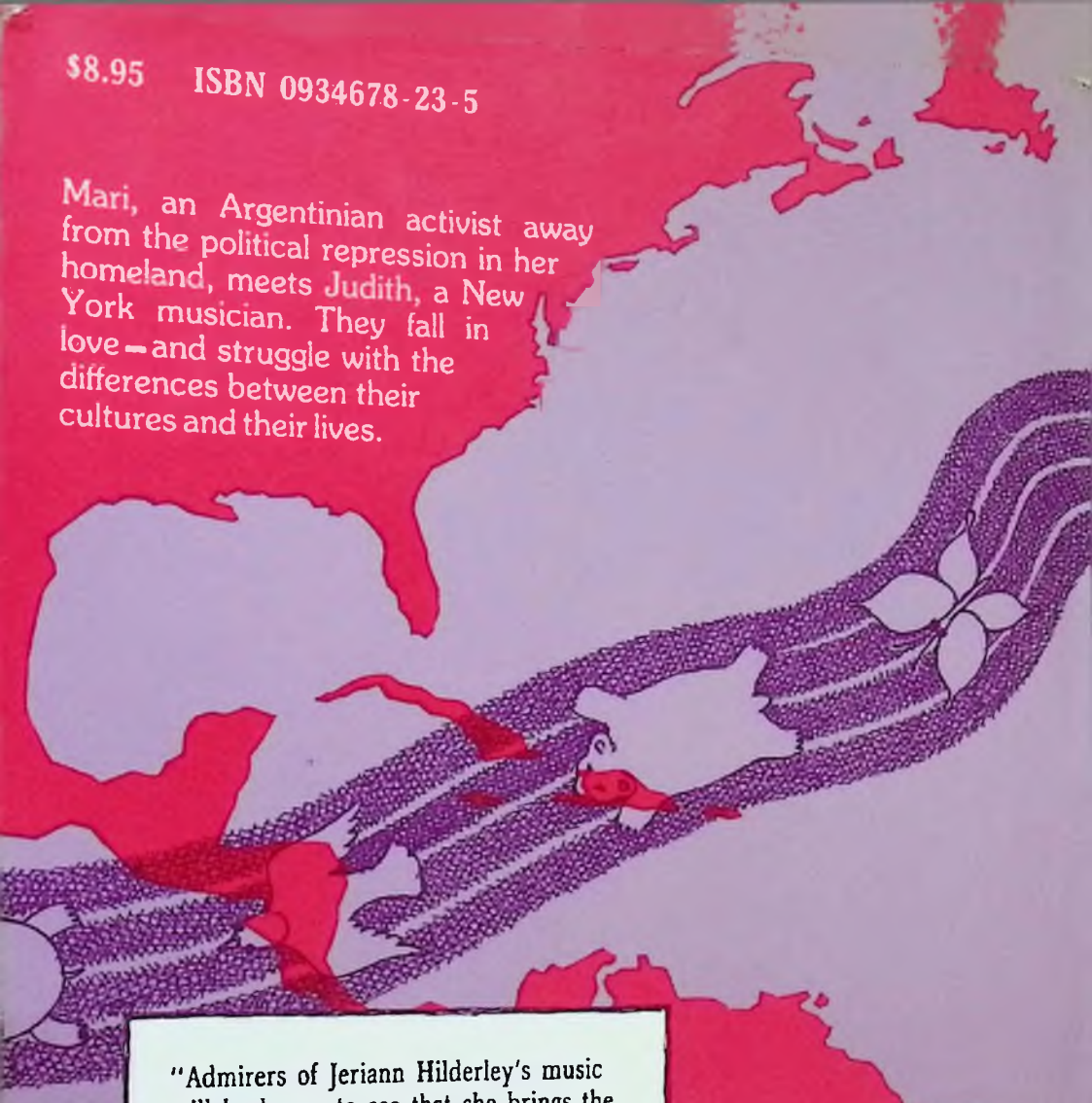

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